



A. — Routes of the Pony Express and early western railroads.

The Pony Express. — In 1860 a rapid mail service was established between St. Joseph, in the state of Missouri, and Sacramento, in the state of California (map, pages 86–87). This was known as the Pony Express (45 A), although the swift horses that were used in this service could not properly be called ponies.

It was on April 3, at four o'clock in the afternoon, that the first Pony Express rider started from St. Joseph. On the same day, another rider left Sacramento. Each of them had mail pouches slung across the saddle. The route that was to be followed had already been carefully laid out (A). At various points along this route there were stations where horses were kept. At first these stations — called relay stations — were about twenty-five miles apart, but later in the rougher and more difficult parts of the route the stations were only ten to twelve miles apart.

From St. Joseph the first relay station was twenty-five miles to the west, and that distance was covered as rapidly as the pony could make it. Shortly before the rider was due, another pony was saddled and waiting. As the rider came into the station he would change from the tired to the fresh pony, and taking his mail pouches with him, be off for the next station with the shortest possible stop.

Each rider used three ponies and rode at first about seventy-five miles in the more open country.

Later, when the distances

between some stations were made less, the riders over that part of the route did not have so far to go. At the end of his run each Pony Express rider would find another rider already in the saddle, ready to grab the mail pouches and be off for the part of the trip that was his. It was often true that the new rider was away before the man who had just arrived had time to get out of his saddle.

In this way the mail was hurried forward without stop, except when Indians, robbers, or accident prevented. When the mail reached Sacramento, that part which was to go to San Francisco was sent forward by a fast steamship. The first trip from St. Joseph to San Francisco took about eleven days, and one fast trip was made in seven days and seventeen hours. Today, as in the days of the Pony Express, the motto of those who carry the mail is: "The mail must go through."